TC 4997

Social Development & World Peace

National Conference of Catholic Bishops / United States Catholic Conference

June 5, 1998

The Honorable Madeleine K. Albright
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madame Secretary,

For many years now, the Catholic Bishops of the United States have expressed their concern about the religious and civil liberties of the people of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. We are aware that you also have shared these concerns, and we recall especially your visit to Indonesia as our U.N. Ambassador in September of 1995 during which you addressed the continuing problem of the human rights situation.

Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo of Dili, recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, has commented recently on the continued civil disturbances that are causing great suffering and growing resentment on the part of the people of East Timor, disturbances caused largely, in the bishop's view, by the heavy-handed excesses of the Indonesian military in the territory.

In view of the recent changes within the Indonesian government, this would seem an appropriate moment for the United States to press anew for a speedy resolution of the East Timor status question that, with the good offices of the United Nations, must be based on the freely expressed wishes of the people of East Timor.

While that longer-term goal is all important, I would urge that the United States advocate an immediate and genuine reduction of the Indonesian military presence in East Timor, the release of prisoners incarcerated for purely political reasons, the guarantee of freedom of speech and assembly, and an end to abuses of peoples' human rights. Minimizing the military presence and ending abuses could greatly enhance the prospects for a genuine solution of the East Timor tragedy.

With all best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Theodore E. McCarrick
Archbishop of Newark
Chairman, USCC Committee on International Policy

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